

Congratulations to all of you being recognized here tonight. Good teachers are amazing people and I am honored and humbled to be representing you.

My Aunt Gail recently sent me a congratulatory card and I'd like to share its contents. It did not have an author listed so unfortunately I cannot give credit to anyone, but perhaps American Greetings.

**What is success?**

Setting Goals-but not in concrete

Staying Focused- but turning aside to help someone

Following a plan-but remaining flexible

Moving Ahead –but not too fast to smell the flowers

Climbing the Ladder-but not stepping on toes

Fighting to the finish-but choosing your battles

Taking a Bow-but applauding those who had a part in your success

I'd like to start by applauding some very special people. My husband Doug: who when asked he how he felt about the traveling I'll be doing, didn't hesitate, but said "Go. We'll be fine, you've earned it." My children David and Kacey: who give the greatest hugs. My sisters, Pat and Liz: my best friends. Special thanks to my Mom and Dad who have always believed I could do anything I put my mind to. My Nana, who has always said I was #1 (I am her 1<sup>st</sup> grandchild after all.) Noranne and Gail: my aunts and greatest cheerleaders. My Carmen Arace Family: I have learned so much from you and would not be standing here without your love and support. And finally to Greg Kane and the generous folks at ING who are making this all possible.

Being a mother and a teacher has brought many blessings. Like the time my son David, who was 5 at the time, showed all the kids in my 5<sup>th</sup> grade class a crab from a touch tank. He showed it to them up close and personal, much to their horror! I am also encouraged by the kind and thoughtful questions my daughter Kacey asks about their well being and mine, when she greets me after a visibly tiring day.

Being a mother and a teacher has also brings many challenges: such as getting everyone, especially me, to school on time and balancing the many needs of my own children with those of my students. One way I juggle the two is to do all school work after my children have gone to bed. This has lead to many late nights with David Letterman; and it is in the spirit of late night TV, I now share with you, the Top 10 reasons I have found success teaching in Bloomfield.

**#10 Bloomfield schools have an incredibly diverse population.**

In my favorite novel Maniac Magee, Jeffrey Magee wonders “why the East Enders called themselves black. He kept looking and looking, and the colors he found were gingersnap, and light fudge and dark fudge and acorn and butter rum and cinnamon and burnt orange.” In my homeroom alone, 11 cultures are represented: Jamaican, Jamerican, Haitian, African American, Puerto Rican, Native American, Spanish, Portuguese, Philippino, Jewish and Irish American. We’re like a mini United Nations.

**#9 Our Bloomfield Education Association is an incredible group of teacher advocates who work together in a positive and professional manner.** Our president has a standing monthly meeting with our Superintendent to address issues proactively and we frequently collaborate with our Central Office on effective projects such as our very successful Mentor program. As an officer and representative for our teachers, I take pride in empowering our staff and looking out for their rights.

**#8 Bloomfield is moving ahead.** Our administration has a vision that is driving our schools into the 21<sup>st</sup> century with gusto. We have new curricula in every academic discipline. We have innovative technology such as Smart Boards in our computer labs and interactive computer teaching tools in math classes, grades 5-8. Our Big Picture High School, the first of its kind in the state, offers unique and distinctive learning opportunities. Bloomfield is an exciting place to teach!

**#7 While staying focused on academics, we also include service learning and community service as significant and respected components of our district mission.**

Classroom projects like our annual Thanksgiving Penny Wars to benefit FOODSHARE and Alex's Lemonade Stands to benefit Pediatric cancer research start our students on the road to becoming contributing members of society. Kids love to give and being part of initiatives like these encourages them to be empathetic and generous towards others. Our schools also coordinated successful system wide drives to benefit recent natural disaster relief efforts: including \$10,000 for tsunami relief and \$13,000 for hurricane relief. Last month I had the good fortune to escort students to listen to former President Clinton thank Connecticut children for these very efforts. He stressed what we've know for years, everyone can make a difference.

**#6 Our system values character education.** These days while many debate whether morals should be taught in schools, we are way ahead. Teaching our students to be responsible and positive members in our community has been a part of our mission for years. In my classes, "Do the right thing because it's the right thing to do," and "Character is how you behave when no one is watching," are sayings heard so often, the kids often finish each statement for me.

**#5 My former students.** Yes, Carmen Arace boasts of famous alumni including Nykesia Sales of the Connecticut Sun and Dwight Freeney of the Indianapolis Colts, but I am proud of all my kids, many of whom I have heard from this past month. Mary Ellen is the Director of Fire & Rescue Services in Farmington, Yana is a Staff Assistant to Senator John Larson in Washington DC, and Delroy, who is here tonight, is climbing the corporate ladder at CIGNA. In 6<sup>th</sup> grade it was obvious Delroy was a genuinely good person as well as one of my brightest students, so it's no surprise to see how successful he's become. Just listen to the Anita Roddick quote he uses to sign his emails. "If you do things well, do them better. Be daring, be first, be different, be just." Impressive isn't it?

**The #4 reason I've found success teaching in Bloomfield is because I can make a difference.** An 8<sup>th</sup> grader who was interviewed during my state site visit told them I changed his life. I knew he had had a great year with me and that I had had a positive influence on him, **but to hear those words**.....This is why I teach. When I am called

“mom”, kids usually blush and say “oops”. My response is “Thanks, there are no kinder words.” I’ve always been the champion of the underdog and I’m often found rooting for that one kid who some people call hopeless. I attempt to follow “the plan”, but often flexibility is what’s needed, that out of the box approach. And I can proudly say, mostly due to my stubborn Irish heritage, that on almost all occasions, I am able to cut through the anger or neglect and make a connection. All kids really want is someone to listen.

**#3 My students are phenomenal!!** They are intelligent, creative, hard working and kind. They make me laugh and sometimes cry. They give me hugs and high fives and never ever break a pinky promise. My expectations are very high and they never cease to reach the bar, no matter how high it is set. I am continually amazed at the wonderful things they say, write and even teach me.

**#2 I teach on a fantastic 5<sup>th</sup> grade team.** We are a wild bunch to observe, ask any one who eats lunch with us!! We joke, we tease and we laugh like crazy people, but our solidarity is unmistakable. Even though we now have 3 teams and 3 team leaders, we still set goals and make decisions as a group and join the teams together whenever possible. Our children sense this cohesiveness and it adds to the feeling that makes us such a strong community.

**The #1 Reason I have found success teaching in Bloomfield is my Carmen Arace Family.** Each morning our announcements begin with these exact words: “Good morning Arace family, please stand for the pledge”. It is a reminder of our commitment to one another and our commitment to excellence. Carmen Arace was our school’s principal many years ago and his beliefs are the foundation for the feeling that permeates our building to this day, even though he’s been gone for 20 years. It is this sentiment that encourages our staff to support each other as colleagues and as friends. We laugh together, we mourn together, we learn together and we face struggles together. We will fight to the finish to improve our test scores and the quality education we provide. It’s not always easy, but we persevere, as families do.

Thank you.